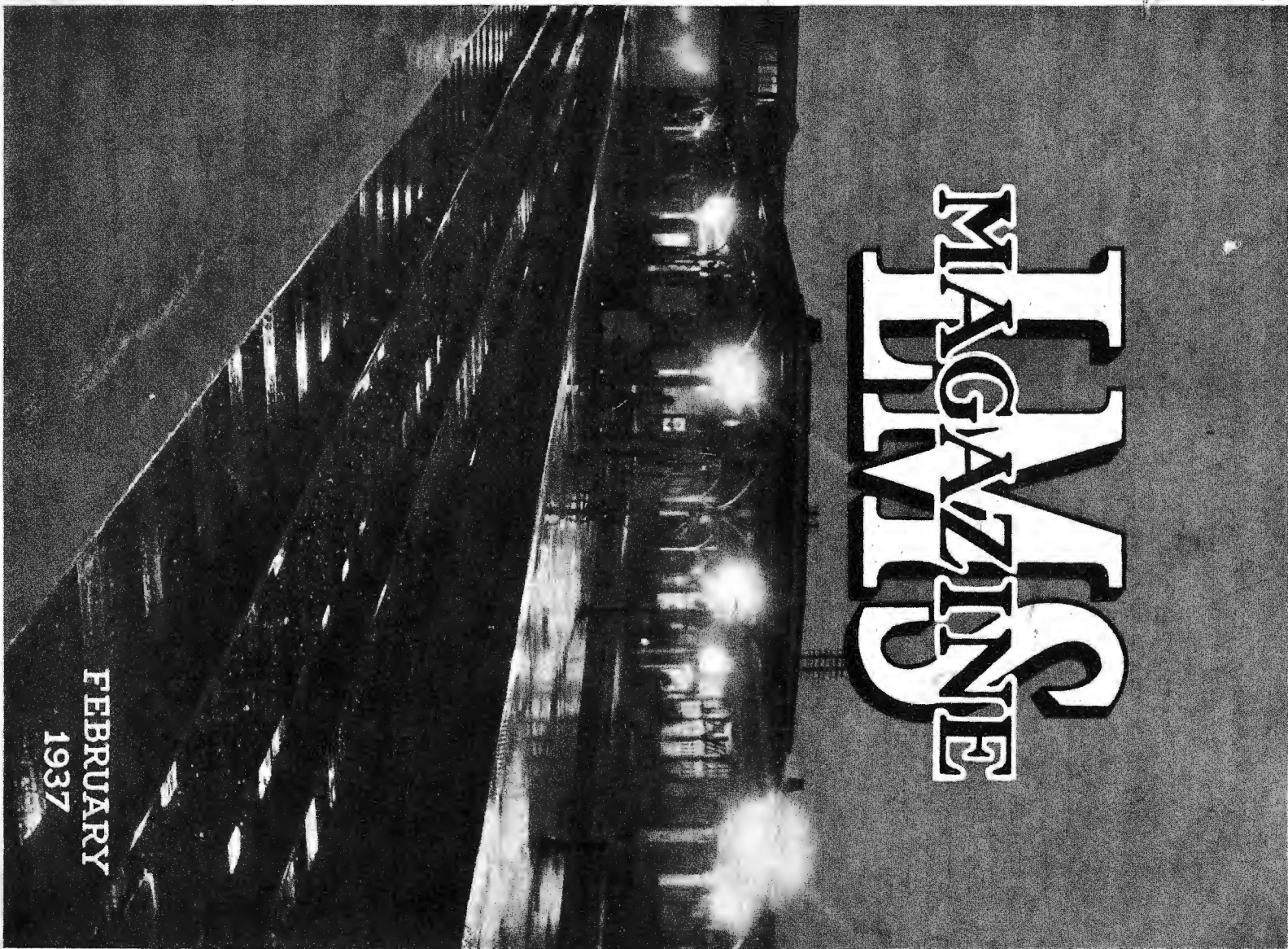


ART EDITION

THE RAILWAY GAZETTE

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THE RAILWAY GAZETTE—"Read wherever there are Railways"

DORNOCH

By T. McA.



Castle Street, Dornoch

DORNOCH, the terminal point of the branch line which runs from the Mound Junction—on the main line to the far north—is one of the most popular resorts in the Highlands. It is beautifully situated beside the sea and bounded on the north and south sides by firths, to one of which it gives its name. The name Dornoch is supposed to be derived from the Gaelic dor-n-ach—"field between two waters."

The scene to the west of Dornoch is typical Highland. Away in the distance lofty mountains, often mist-capped, seem to project into the Dornoch Firth. Nearer at hand pleasant farms and woodlands give to the observer a picture which cannot fail to delight.

The Cathedral is one of the oldest in Scotland and has suffered at the hands of friend and foe alike. A short account of its eventful history might be of some interest to readers.

We first hear of Dornoch when St. Bar, or Finbar, a Bishop of Caithness, chose it as his chief place for divine service. He erected, about the year 1130, a handsome church with houses for his clergy.

Little more is heard of Dornoch until early in the thirteenth century, when Bishop Gilbert Murray built his famous Cathedral over the ruins of St. Bar's Church.

Bishop Gilbert was resolved to erect a Cathedral equal to any then known, and had it built somewhat similar in design to Elgin Cathedral, then in course of erection. There was an aisled nave, transept and choir—a chapter of ten canons, a dean, precentor, chancellor, treasurer and arch-deacon.

According to Sir Robert Gordon, Bishop Gilbert died in 1245, and "was according to his own appointment, buried at the cathedrall church in Dornogh, wher his buriall place is to be sein at this day, directlie under the steiple."

We will now go forward to the sixteenth century. The year 1567 was notable in Sutherland for the murder of the Earl and Countess of Sutherland at Helmsdale Castle. Taking advantage of the minority of the young Earl, John Sinclair, Earl of Caithness, invaded Sutherland at the head of a large body of men. To give his

designs a rightful appearance, he appointed himself Guardian of Alexander, then only eighteen. He took possession of Dunrobin Castle, the seat of the Sutherlands, and "managed" the estates for his "ward", being virtual master of Sutherland.

The Murrays, a powerful clan, did not relish this, and in 1569 succeeded in removing the lad out of the Earl of Caithness's clutches. This effected, they declared they would no longer pay allegiance to him or acknowledge him as Guardian of their lord.

The disappointed and enraged schemer gathered together a large body of men, and in concert with the clan MacKay, set out to obtain obedience from the Murrays by force of arms.

Meanwhile, the Murrays had strengthened

length and 45 feet high along the chancel and nave. The breadth of the nave is 25 feet (originally the breadth between the pier arches within the aisles). The square of the tower is 30 feet each way. The transepts are each 31 feet in length. The whole length of the church along the transepts is 92 feet. The height of the steeple is about 120 feet. The piscina is still to be seen in the south wall of the choir.* The choir, containing in its vaults the remains of a number of the Sutherland family, has a full-length statue of the first Duke (1758-1833) by Chantrey, and there is a large tablet behind to the memory of his Duchess-Countess (1765-1839). The cost of rebuilding the Cathedral was £6,000, and it contains 1,000 sittings.



The Golf Course at Dornoch

themselves in the town and castle of Dornoch and succeeded in holding out against their attackers for several days. The enemy at length managed to capture the outskirts of the town and set it on fire.

The Cathedral and Castle caught fire and shared in the general ruin which followed. Fortunately the tower of the Cathedral with some fine Gothic arches escaped and remained thus until the seventeenth century.

In 1616 a certain amount of restoration was attempted, when the Earl of Sutherland partially repaired the Cathedral to make it into a Parish Church. Otherwise it was left in a ruinous condition until 1835. Between the years 1835 and 1837 it was rebuilt from the foundation with the exception of the central tower and some old windows which were preserved.

The Cathedral as it now stands is "126 feet in

Dornoch obtained its first charter in July, 1628, as a Royal Burgh. It is thought that it was then the old Cross of Dornoch was erected as a "mercant cross", and if such is the case, it can be claimed to be the most northerly of the Scottish "Mercat Crosses."

It was in Dornoch the last witch of Scotland was burned for transforming her daughter into a pony. The spot is now marked by a stone near the Golf Courses.

The town possesses a splendid sandy beach suitable for bathing; a fresh breezy and dry atmosphere and excellent golf courses equal to any in Scotland.

Surely here is something to suit everybody's taste, and the visitor to Dornoch will leave it regretfully and with the resolution to return there next year.

* Transactions of the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society.